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Deceiving the Deceivers: Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, and Guy Burgess (review)

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Deceiving the Deceivers: Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, and Guy Burgess. By S. J. Hamrick. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-300-10416-2. Appendixes. Notes. Index. Pp. xvii, 297. $29.95.

What if everything you know is wrong? It is upon this intriguing, indeed beguiling, question that S. J. Hamrick's new book is built. He takes on the intertwined espionage cases of Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, and Guy Burgess, viewing them through a revisionist prism that winds up in an extended flight of counterespionage fancy.

In fairness to Hamrick, the saga of the Cambridge Five, particularly the drama of Philby, Maclean, and Burgess, is perhaps the most overplayed story in modern espionage; some reexamination is in order, if only to cut through the morass of half-truths left in the wake of so many accounts of the notorious British traitors.

Unfortunately, Hamrick only adds to the mountain of speculation in an ingenious, albeit highly suspect, fashion. By selectively reviewing declassified U.S. intelligence records—principally the National Security Agency's Venona releases—and artfully selecting from memoir accounts and secondary sources, he posits an early Cold War British disinformation operation of breathtaking scope and impact.

By rereading (mostly misreading) Venona messages, Hamrick asserts that Maclean was known by British counterintelligence to be a Soviet agent and was doubled, resulting in a long-term deception scheme that took in Philby and the other members of the Cambridge ring. Therefore, the Philby and related cases, far from being an intelligence debacle for London, represented a world-class success that duped the Soviets at the dawn of the Cold War. In this version, the Americans were kept in the dark about this astonishing coup. Hamrick's revisionist take is nothing if not daring.

As for evidence for any of this, there is none. By slyly analyzing Venona—in many cases finding inconsistencies where none exist—Hamrick winds up with a "Monster Plot" so devious that it would baffle James Angleton; this reassessment of the Cambridge ring is beyond that master CIA counterspy's theories, even the outlandish ones concocted after one of Angleton's famously boozy Georgetown lunches. Counterintelligence professionals are known to spin far-fetched explanations for mundane things; to an extent, this is a job requirement. However, Hamrick's book takes this to a new level—and length.

Hamrick finds revealing London's well-known reluctance to declassify any intelligence matters, while he considers the NSA's supposed silence on Venona-related materials deeply consequential. He proves that "inconsistencies" can be found in any account, and amplified for dramatic effect. Unfortunately for Hamrick, he includes no meaningful discussion of how the Soviets viewed the Cambridge Five, an omission explained by his slight use of Russian accounts. He fails to note that some Soviet intelligence officers, principally the KGB analyst Yelena Modrzhinskaya, were initially convinced that Philby and his fellow spies had to be under London's control, as their

information seemed too good to be true; fortunately for Moscow, Modrzhinskaya's skepticism did not prevail.

A former U.S. Foreign Service officer, Hamrick has published several novels, and *Deceiving the Deceivers* is engagingly written in a conspiratorial style that reads better in works of fiction than historical accounts. Scholars cannot be encouraged that a fine house such as Yale University Press, which has published many excellent books on intelligence, has put out a work that consists of too-clever misreadings of the historical record and semi-informed speculation. To this reviewer—who served with NSA as an intelligence analyst and counterintelligence officer, including extensive work with Venona materials—this book is incredible, and ought to serve as a cautionary tale to those who spend too many hours in the wilderness of mirrors, and not enough in careful examination of historical sources and materials.

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The Korean War at Fifty: International Perspectives. Edited by Mark F. Wilkinson. Lexington, Va.: John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis, Virginia Military Institute, 2004. ISBN 0-9761107-0-9. Maps. Photographs. Tables. Notes. Index. Pp. 297. $10.00.

This collection of essays growing out of one of the numerous conferences held to acknowledge the fifty-year anniversary of the Korean War covers a wide range of subjects related to the event and includes a similarly wide array of authors. Although, as is often the case with such volumes, coherence is not a strong suit, the editor groups the essays into four sections: "Nations at War," which includes essays by Burton I. Kaufman on President Harry S. Truman's leadership during the war, Alexandre Y. Mansourov on Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's and North Korean leader Kim Il-sung's maneuvers leading up to the initiation of war on 25 June 1950, and Chen Jian on trends in understanding the Chinese side based on a wealth of new documentation; "Fighting and Negotiating," which includes essays by Paul F. Braim on General Van Fleet's efforts to build the South Korean army, John Kieh-chiang Oh on the contribution of the South Korean army to the war effort against North Korea and China, Lieutenant General Edward L. Rowny on his experiences fighting in Korea, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons on the Inchon landing—with special attention to the role of VMI graduates—Li Xiaobing on the role and experience of the Chinese People's Volunteers in the war, and James I. Matray on the lengthy armistice talks; "Homefront, U.S.A.," which includes essays by Paul G. Pierpaoli, Jr., on the impact of the war on the American industrial base, Marilyn B. Young on American war movies and American sentiment towards the war, and Colonel Henry G. Gole on a combination of his own experience with the war and how it has been and is remembered by Americans since 1953; and "The Impact of the